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ABSTRACT

Because of their open-door policy, community colleges enroll a significant proportion of the poorly prepared students entering higher education. Many educators feel that colleges operating under open-door policies have a responsibility to identify underprepared students and provide them with the necessary developmental support. Colleges are usually urged to evaluate psychological as well as academic factors; however, this requires the commitment of extensive financial and human resources. Thus, many colleges limit their assessment efforts to basic skills. Although such assessment should ideally be provided for all students, realistically it can only be applied under certain circumstances. The most common form of assessment is the standardized test, which is preferable to often unreliable high school grades. Successful assessment efforts depend upon a centrally administered, easily accessible program, and well-trained personnel. Once students in need of remediation are identified, colleges typically either require remediation prior to enrollment in content area courses, allow limited enrollment in content area courses concurrent with remediation, or provide coordinated remedial and content area instruction. (MAB)

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Fact Sheet

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The Assessment of Entering Students

Because of the open-door policy, community colleges bear the brunt of the poorly prepared students entering higher education (Cohen and Brawer, 1982). Once enrolled, these students often struggle alongwith their studies, despite serious skill deficiencies. In a survey of 6,426 students in a large, urban community college district, Friedlander (1981) found that of the students who did not feel confident in one or more skill areas, less than 30% took advantage of a remediating support service. Today, many educators feel that colleges operating under open-door policies have a responsibility to identify underprepared students and to see that they get the developmental support necessary for educational success.

WHAT SHOULD BE ASSESSED?

Success in college is dependent upon both cognitive and affective skills. For this reason, colleges are usually urged to assessboth psychological factors (such as interpersonal skills, motivation, and self-image) as well as competencies in the basic skills of reading, math, and writing. Such a comprehensive program, however, requires the commitment of extensive fiscal and human resources. Thus, many colleges limit their assessment efforts to basic skills areas, which are more readily definable than affective competencies.

WHO SHOULD BE ASSESSED?

Ideally, all students entering under an open-door policy should be immediately assessed. However, lack of a comprehensive plan; large numbers of part-time students; late registrants; scattered off-campus learning centers; and budgetary constraints force many colleges to limit their assessment efforts. At some colleges, assessment is voluntary. Other colleges require assessment if the student meets certain criteria related to full-time/part-time status, ACT or SAT scores, high school grades and the relative difficulty of the course in which the student wants to enroll. These criteria may be based on a standard profile of the ``high-risk'' student that is developed by faculty through observation and/or institutional research. At other colleges, students are assessed only after they have completed a specified number of credit hours and thus appear to be in pursuit of a degree or certificate.

WHAT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES CAN BE USED?

Roueche and Archer (1979) note that the most commonly used assessment tools are published standardized tests and locally designed assessment instruments. High school grades, the authors note, may be unreliable assessment aids because of grade inflation, lowered academic standards, inaccurately administered tests, and other factors.

A wide variety of standardized tests are available. Some of the more well known tests (which are reviewed by Roueche and Archer) include the American College Testing Battery needs of an (ACT), the California Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, the Strong Vocational Interest Blank, and the Brown-Holtzman Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes. While these instruments provide ready-made tools for assessment, tests users are often not informed about the scope, reliability, and validity of published tests. Opinions of professionals at other colleges are a good source of information about assessment instruments. Published reviews of tests in *The Eighth Mental Measurement Yearbook (1978), Reading Tests and Reviews II (1975), and Intelligence Test and Reviews (1978)* are also sources of information; each is edited by Oscar Buros and published by the Gryphon Press. In addition, the ERIC database provides current reviews and descriptions of tests, programs, and procedures.

Many colleges develop their own assessment instruments on the basis of cognitive and affective competencies that their faculty feelare requisite to classroom and program success. While such instruments may be tailored to the unique ndividual college, norms (with which the validity of the test is measured) can be determined only after the test has been applied numerous times. Nonetheless, locally designed test, descriptions of which may be found through a search of the ERIC database, remain a primary means of assessing entering students at two-year colleges (Roueche and Archer).

WHO SHOULD DO THE ASSESSING?

Successful assessment efforts depend upon (1) a centrally administered program that is easily accessible to students, and (2) well-trained testing and counseling personnel.

Cramer and Liberty (1980, p. 20) recommend that all assessment activities be conducted ``from a single, centrally accessible location, preferably in the Student Services area'' and that ``one person be charged with overseeing all aspects of assessment.'' Roueche and Archer (1979) note the importance of a comfortable testing environment and stress that assessment personnel know how to make students feel at ease, to properly interpret test results, and to explain the results without discouraging the student. Persons in charge of assessment should protect the confidentiality of the assessment results and assure that these results are used appropriately.

HOW ARE ASSESSMENT RESULTS UTILIZED?

The impact of the test results on the student's educational program varies from college to college. Each college determines (1) how test scores are interpreted and (2) whether remediation should be mandatory for students with demonstrated skill deficiencies. In determining cut off scores for individual tests, colleges need to balance test norms with the ``facilities available to deal with deficiencies diagnosed'' (Roueche and Archer, p.26). Although test norms may indicate, for example, that persons scoring in thelower 20 percent require remediation, the college may only have the facilities

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to accommodate those students scoring in the bottom 10 percent.

Colleges, having identified students in need of remediation, usually pursue one or more of the following approaches to remediation: (1) requiring the students to take remedial courses prior to enrolling in content area courses; (2) allowing students to take a limited number of content area courses while in remediation; or (3) providing coordinated remedial and content area instruction.

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

The following sources can be consulted for further information on the assessment of entering students:

ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH PLACEMENT EXAMINATIONS: A STUDY. SAN MATEO COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT BASIC SKILLS PROJECT. San Mateo, CA: San Mateo Community College District, 1978. 69p. ED 148 424.

Cohen, Arthur M. and Florence B. Brawer. *THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1982.

Cramer, Ray and Susan Liberty. *A PLAN FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES FOR DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS STUDENTS AT FRESNO CITY COLLEGE.* Fresno, CA: Fresno City College, 1981. 72p. ED 207 656.

Friedlander, Jack. *WHY DON'T POORLY PREPARED STUDENTS SEEK HELP?* Los Angeles, CA: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1981. 14p. ED 203 901.

Hendrick, Larry. *AN INTEGRATED STUDENT DIAGNOSIS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL: A SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS REPORT OF THE LOS RIOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT MASTER PLAN.* Sacramento, CA: Los Rios Community College District, 1980. 42p. ED 188 731.

Johnson, Jerome A. and others. *ONE STATE'S EFFORTS TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT THE HIGH RISK STUDENT: ASSESSMENT, FACULTY ADVISING, CAREER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION IN OREGON'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES.* Salem, OR: Oregon State Department of Education, 1980. 133p. ED 188 732.

Linthicum, Dorothy S. *DUNDALK COMMUNITY COLLEGE DEVELOPMENTALEDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECT.* Baltimore, MD: Dundalk Community College, 1980. 92p. ED 206 332.

Roueche, John E. and Patricia F. Archer. "Entry Level Assessment in Colleges." *COMMUNITY COLLEGE REVIEW* Spring 1979, 6(4), 15-27.

Roueche, Suanne D. and Veronica Nora Comstock. *A REPORT ON THEORY AND METHOD FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES.* Austin, TX: Department of Educational Administration, 1981. 505p. ED 211 161.